

## Ten key pointers for future policy based on the Special Constabulary national statistics

- 1) The scale of falls in Special Constabulary numbers constitutes a major crisis for the future of the Special Constabulary. It prompts a need to fundamentally reconsider the current model, which makes the ASCO *Thinking about the Future* review particularly timely. The review begins its fieldwork and engagement stage this September and will report in September 2021.
- 2) Not enough Special Constables are being recruited and trained. Across most forces there is a structural gap in resourcing and capacity. There is a need for a concerted national plan and investment to help police forces increase their capacity to recruit and train Special Constables, especially in the context of competing demands from the national Uplift programme. Whilst some forces reflect a growth in investment in an expansion of numbers and capability (e.g. Essex over recent years), other forces have expanded investment whilst seeing numbers significantly fall, raising doubts about value for money and return on investment, and suggesting more needs to be known about how to grow Special Constabularies effectively.
- 3) Urgent attention should be given in particular in those forces which have ongoing recruitment freezes, as to the impact that these are having on numbers, capability, and future sustainability. A typical police force will see its numbers half in just eighteen months if it freezes recruitment.
- 4) There is a need to better retain Special Constables. Key elements of this include effective deployment, the quality of leadership and support, and enhancing opportunities to develop, lead and specialise.
- 5) There is a need to recruit and retain more 'career' Special Constables. Longer-serving Special Constables form the bedrock of the sustainability of the Special Constabulary model. The data reflects instead widespread churn of younger Special Constables to join up for short periods whilst on a pathway to the Regular service. Focusing on different approaches to attraction and recruitment, and further building models of Employer Supported Policing, can help in this. A more structured national approach to this would be beneficial.
- 6) There is little growth in numbers being seen anywhere. It would be a useful exercise to look across police forces to understand what works well in achieving growth of Special Constabulary role and numbers, with a particular focus on sustainability.

- 7) The Special Constabulary has a gender problem, particularly in respect of higher resignation rates and shorter voluntary careers for female officers, and lower representation of females in leadership and specialisms. There needs to be a national focus and strategy to better understand this and to address it.
- 8) The Metropolitan Special Constabulary represents almost a fifth of Special Constables nationally. Strategically, the MSC is very important to the overall development of the Special Constabulary nationally. It is also the most diverse Special Constabulary in the country. Supporting the MSC to grow and develop should be seen as a national priority.
- 9) Beyond the scale of reduction in numbers, the other striking message across the data is the sheer scale of variation in Special Constabularies. For example, looking at the numbers of Special Constables there are six-fold differences in the sizes of Special Constabularies. One force has a Special Constable for every five regular officers, another force has one Special Constable for every thirty.
- 10) There are significant strategic developments at national level, but it is still too early to tell whether these are having any impact on the core issues of reducing size and capability. Given the scale of challenges the latest national statistics suggest, there seems a strong argument to consider 'scaling up' national coordination and investment. ASCO welcomes the new national role of 'Sustainability and Uplift Coordinator' and looks forward to working positively to help support efforts to reverse the decline in the Special Constabulary.